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Student Ratings of Typical and Actual Instructors (CTQ)

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ABSTRACT

The relationships between students' ratings of typical instructors (RTI) and specific course instructors (RSI) were explored. Correlations between RTI and RSI were generally significant but relatively low (.07 - .24). A stepwise regression procedure indicated that RTI could account for about 8% of the variance in the overall rating given a specific instructor; individual RSI items accounted for about 60%. The data indicate that instructor ratings taken at the end of a course are relatively free of bias from generalized attitudes about instructors.

Student Ratings of Typical and Actual Instructors (CTQ)

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With the onset of the student rebellion of the 1960's, concern for the evaluation of college instructors has grown. One manifestation of this concern is the increased use of teacher rating forms. Such forms are typically filled out by students near the end of courses and include items designed to get student's opinion about the qualities of the instructor. Faculty member reaction to such ratings varies from widely enthusiastic to strongly disparaging. A common criticism is that the ratings reflect merely the student's generalized attitudes to instructors and courses, not an objective evaluation of a specific instructor. As Kulk and McKeachie put it, "some students are easily pleased and others never satisfied" (1975, p. 214).

This view is supported by a study reported by Rosenshine (1973). Rosenshine found that relationships between student's end of course ratings and teacher behaviors disappeared if a pre-rating of the instructor were factored out. Rosenshine argued that if the residual variance in post-ratings was not related to teaching behaviors, then the post-ratings were of little meaning. However, Rosenshine himself noted that his pre-rating measure was questionable. Essentially his measure was a rating of the instructor taken a month after classes had started.

Given a month of instruction it seems likely that students had formed opinions about specific instructors. Thus the pre-rating probably did not truly reflect generalized attitudes.

The purpose of the present study was to examine the relationships between students' generalized attitudes towards instructors and courses and their end of course ratings of specific instructors. Contrary to Rosenshine, the initial rating pre-measures were obtained before students would have had any chance to form opinions of the specific instructors.

METHOD

Subjects

The subjects were 460 students (173 males and 287 females) attending five undergraduate psychology courses at Iowa State University.

Materials

The teacher rating questionaire which was used was based on the standard form available at Iowa State University. The form contained a total of 25 items. The first eight items requested background information such as sex, academic major, and class year. Also included in this group of items was an item asking each student to rate his/her interest in academic work. The next 16 items requested ratings of various teacher characteristics and behaviors. The last item requested an overall rating of the instructor.

During the first week of the academic quarter, the students were asked to fill out the rating form on the basis of their opinions about typical instructors in courses similar in size and nature to the course in which the form was administered. The same rating form was administered again during the last week of the quarter. However, each student this time was instructed to rate the specific instructor of the course they were presently attending.

RESULTS

Pearson correlation coefficients were computed between Ratings of Typical Instructors (RTI) and Ratings of Specific Instructors (RSI). These correlations ranged from .07 to .24. (See Table 1) All but the smallest was significant (alpha = .01).

To further assess the effects of prior attitudes on RSI a secondary analysis was employed. Based upon factor analyses of rating data, French-Lozovik (1974) had reported that overall ratings of instructors could be predicted very well (multiple Rs about .95) from scores on three factors labeled: 1. Clarity of Exposition 2. Arousal of Interest and 3. Stimulation of Thinking. Scores on other factors contributed little to overall rating. Since overall ratings of instructors are often used as summary descriptions of teaching quality by evaluation committees it seemed important to assess the specific contribution of RTI to teachers' overall ratings.

Accordingly, the individual items data from the present study were factor analyzed (Principal Components Analysis/ Varimax Rotation). Three factors emerged which were labeled: 1. Clarity of Exposition (CE) 2. Attitude towards Students (AS) 3. Aids to Student Understanding of Course Material (ASUC). (That Arousal of Interest and Stimulation of Thinking factors did not emerge is probably due to lack of such items on the standard Iowa State rating form). Factors scores on these factors were used to predict overall ratings in two stepwise regression procedures. In the first procedure factor scores from RSI were used to predict overall RSI. In the second stepwise procedure factor scores based on RTI and the background variable of class year were entered into the regression equation prior to the RSI factors. In this way the attenuation in the predictability of overall RSI rating due to prior attitude could be assessed. The results of these first analysis yielded the following: multiple R^2 (3,456) = .84, $p < .01$; CE_{RSI} accounted for 59% of the variance, AS_{RSI} for 10% and $ASCUM_{RSI}$ for 2%. In the second analysis the model was: OVERALL RSI = CE_{RTI} + AS_{RTI} + $ASCUM_{RTI}$ + CLASSYEAR + CE_{RSI} + AS_{RSI} + $ASCUM_{RSI}$. A multiple R^2 of .84 resulted. The important result is that RTI and class year factor only accounted for about 8% of the overall variance. The contributions of the RSI factors were as follows: CE_{RSI} = 52%, AS_{RSI} = 5%, $ASCUM_{RSI}$ = 7%. These results suggest that most of the variance in overall ratings of instructors can be attributed to the students perceptions of the individual

qualities of the instructors, not to prior attitudes and background variables.

Two factoral analyses of variance including student background variables were performed. The dependent measures were total RTI and RSI. The three factors were Class year (1-4) X Sex (M vs F) X Level of academic interest (High, Average, Low). In both analysis only the effect of Level of Academic Interest was significant, $F(2,437) = 17.65$ $p < .01$, and $F(2,437) = 4.46$, $p < .01$ respectively. Average rating of instructor declined as level of interest decreased.

CONCLUSIONS

The results of the correlational analysis of RTI and RSI suggest that RTI are in fact related to RSI and that a portion of the variance in RSI can be attributed to the students general attitudes towards instructors. However, contrary to Rosenshine's (1973) data, the degree of the relationship is small. In the Rosenshine study the total RTI-RSI correlation was .88, while in the present study the comparable figure was .28. The present results are similar to the findings of Feldhusen and Starks (1970, reported in McKeachie and Kulik, 1975 p. 214). These results suggest that Rosenshine's conclusions about the relationship between pre and post rating data were incorrect. Rosenshine's study was a reanalysis of a study reported by Flanders (1969). While the original Flander's study had reported correlations between observed teacher behaviors and student ratings,

Rosenshine's reanalysis suggested that those reported correlations were meaningless because of the pre-post rating correlations. The present data suggest that the Rosenshine reanalysis was inappropriate and that Flander's original correlations are meaningful.

The multiple regression analyses further supports this conclusion, in that the attenuation of the predictability of the overall RSI rating by generalized attitudes of instructors is small. In fact, these results suggest that most of the variance in overall ratings of instructors can be attributed to the students perceptions of the individual qualities of the instructor, and not to prior attitudes and general background variables.

The analyses of variance data generally support results of earlier studies (see McKeachie and Kulik, 1975) that student characteristics such as sex and class year are not strong determinants of ratings of teachers. However, level of interest in academic work does seem to significantly effect ratings of instructors. Students whose interest is high, and perhaps congruent with those of the instructor, tend to rate instructors more favorably than do students with low interest in academics.

From a practical perspective, the results of this study suggest that end of course ratings of instructors can be taken

for what they are worth without placing much concern about the students generalized attitudes towards courses and instructors. Generalized attitude is not an important factor in ratings data unless one is attempting to discriminate small differences in mean instructor ratings. However, given the normal variance in instructor ratings, small mean differences are probably meaningless anyway. Unfortunately faculty evaluation committees sometimes attempt to interpret small differences in mean ratings. The fact that portions of the difference may be due to students' generalized attitudes should increase the caution with which small differences are interpreted.

Table 1

Correlations Between Student Ratings of Typical and Actual Instructors for Each Rating Characteristic.[1]

Characteristic	Correlation Coefficient
Organization/Planning	.19**
Class time efficiency	.24**
Preparedness	.16*
Interest	.12*
Oral presentation	.19**
Written presentation	.12*
Explanations	.12*
Relevance	.13*
Respect	.15*
Tolerance	.14*
Fairness	.22*
Availability	.13*
Expectations	.07
Amount of work	.10
Relevance of work	.10
Evaluation	.17**
Overall Rating	.13*
Total Rating	.28**

1 (n = 460)
* $p < .01$
** $p < .001$

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